

HEALTH

Healthy Eating Means Spending More at Store

Study finds cost is barrier for many

(AP) — A healthy diet is expensive and could make it difficult for Americans to meet new U.S. nutritional guidelines, according to a study published Thursday that says the government should do more to help consumers eat healthier.

An update of what used to be known as a food pyramid in 2010 had called on Americans to eat more foods containing potassium, dietary fiber, vitamin D and calcium. But if they did that, the study authors said, they would add hundreds more dollars to their annual grocery bill.

Inexpensive ways to add these nutrients to a person's diet include potatoes and beans for potassium and dietary fiber. But the study found introducing more potassium in a diet is likely to add \$380 per year to the average consumer's food costs, said lead researcher Pablo Monsivais, an assistant professor in the Department of Epidemiology and the School of Public Health at the University of Washington.

"We know more than ever about

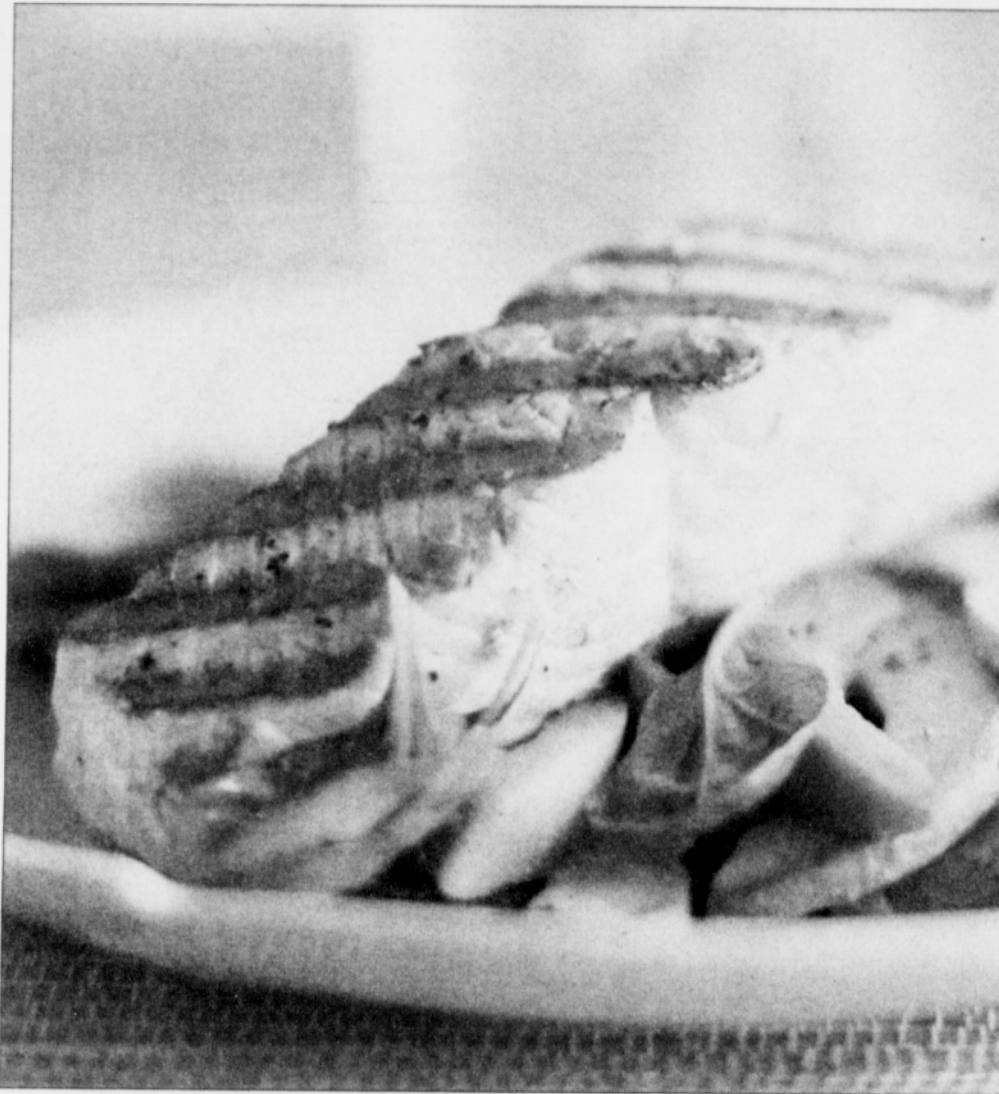
the science of nutrition, and yet we have not yet been able to move the needle on healthful eating," he said. The government should provide help for meeting the nutritional guidelines in an affordable way.

He criticized some of the marketing for a healthy diet—for example, the image of a plate of salmon, leafy greens and maybe some rice pilaf—and said a meal like that is not affordable for many Americans.

Food-assistance programs are helping people make healthier choices by providing coupons to buy fruits and vegetables, Monsivais said, but some also put stumbling blocks in front of the poor.

He mentioned, as an example, a Washington state policy making it difficult to buy potatoes with food assistance coupons for women with children, even though potatoes are one of the least expensive ways to add potassium to a diet.

The study, published in the journal Health Affairs, was based on a random telephone survey of about



New federal guidelines are advising Americans to eat eight ounces of seafood rich in omega-3s per week for brain and heart health. But a new study, finds many of these kinds of healthy foods, like salmon are too expensive for many consumers.

2,000 adults in King County, Wash., followed by a printed questionnaire that was returned by about 1,300 people. They noted what food they ate, which was analyzed for nutrient content and estimated cost.

People who spend the most on food tend to get the closest to meeting the federal guidelines for potassium, dietary fiber, vitamin D and calcium, the study found. Those who spend the least have the lowest intakes of the four recommended nutrients and the highest consumption of saturated fat and added sugar.

Hilary Seligman, assistant professor of medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, said Monsivais' research is an interesting addition to the debate about healthy eating and food insecurity, her area of expertise.

"Almost 15 percent of households in America say they don't have enough money to eat the way they want to eat," Seligman said. Recent estimates show 49 million Americans make food decisions based on cost, she added.

For Your Health

Drug Benefit Peace of Mind

BY LARRY LUCAS



When I was younger, I was taught to respect my elders. Now that I'm one of those "elders," I'm grateful to know that so many abide by the same maxim. It's not always fun growing older, but thanks to widespread support for the Medicare Part D prescription drug program, it's certainly a bit easier to swallow.

Part D has been a huge success since its creation in 2006. For one thing, it's far more cost effective for the federal government than initially anticipated. The Medicare Trustees have stated that spending related to Part D is more than 40 percent lower than their initial 10-year estimate.

What's more, the Congressional Budget Office recently lowered its 10-year projection of federal spending on Medicare, noting that the majority of the reduction—roughly \$120 billion—is the result of lower-than-expected Part D spending.

But the real success of the Part D program comes from the relief it provides to seniors across the country.

More than 40 million people

have received comprehensive prescription drug coverage from Part D. And, most importantly, they're overwhelmingly satisfied with the coverage they receive: A survey conducted last fall by Medicare Today found that 84 percent of seniors report being happy with the prescription drug coverage their Part D programs provide.

Such widespread satisfaction comes as no surprise when you consider the record access seniors now have to affordable medicines thanks to Part D—particularly in light of last year's Affordable Care Act (ACA), which included provisions aimed at helping seniors afford the drugs they need.

Specifically, the biopharmaceutical industry is working to help policymakers close the infamous "donut hole," the gap in drug coverage that has troubled seniors in the past. Now, America's biopharmaceutical companies are providing a 50 percent discount on brand-name prescription drugs for seniors who are eligible. These discounts have only been in effect since January,

and already American seniors have saved north of \$160 million as a result. Because of the provisions outlined in the ACA, the donut hole is expected to close completely by 2020.

This is a serious and welcome relief for all seniors, but especially for those with chronic diseases who require long-term, daily drug therapies to lead healthy lives.

Because some chronic illnesses such as diabetes and cancer are particularly prevalent among African Americans, this is great news for seniors in our community. But there are more benefits for seniors from the Affordable Care Act. Medicare beneficiaries may also qualify for a slew of preventative health services to help manage or even prevent chronic diseases. Such services include tobacco use cessation counseling, annual physicals and free screenings for various diseases including cancer and diabetes.

We never can predict the future, and growing older is often accompanied by endless concerns. So perhaps the greatest thing to come from the Medicare prescription drug program is this: Approximately 94 percent of seniors feel "peace of mind" because of the coverage they receive through Part D, according to Medicare Today, and such peace truly is invaluable.

If you have questions about your

current Medicare Part D coverage or would like help reviewing your plan, Medicare counselors are available to help. Give them a call at 1-800-MEDICARE or visit

medicare.gov for more information.

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